

TORONTO SYMPHONY YOUTH ORCHESTRA

Nicholas Sharma, RBC Resident Conductor &
TSYO Conductor

Mendelssohn's Reformation

Nicholas Sharma, conductor

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

Russian Easter Festival Overture, Op. 36

Jean Sibelius

Finlandia, Op. 26

Anna Clyne

This Moment

Intermission

Felix Mendelssohn

Symphony No. 5 in D Major, Op. 107
"Reformation"

I. Andante – Allegro con fuoco

II. Allegro vivace

III. Andante

IV. Andante con moto – Allegro vivace

Program 3

Saturday,
November 29, 2025

3:00pm

George Weston Recital Hall

*The TSO's Education and
Community Engagement
programs are generously
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Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)

Russian Easter Festival Overture, Op. 36

Composed 1887–1888

15 min

NIKOLAI RIMSKY-KORSAKOV was the most technically skilled (if not the most emotionally profound) of the Russian composers who expanded upon Mikhail Glinka's pioneering efforts in drawing upon their country's folk music for inspiration. His greatest claim to fame came through a mastery of colourful orchestration. Combining it with a taste for epic and fairy-tale subjects led him to create numerous lavish orchestral and operatic scores.

Between 1887 and 1888, he composed his three most popular instrumental works: *Scheherazade*, a suite inspired by the *Arabian Nights* legends; *Capriccio espagnol*, a rhapsody based on Spanish folk melodies; and this dynamic concert overture, whose building blocks are traditional chants of the Russian Orthodox Church. In these works, he reached new heights of instrumental wizardry, but they appear to have exhausted his interest in purely orchestral music. Opera became his focus for the remainder of his career.

For centuries, Easter has been Russia's most significant and most colourfully celebrated holiday. It represents not only a major Christian festival, but also a reminder of earlier traditions marking the arrival of spring. Rimsky-Korsakov addressed both sides of this duality in this overture.

As he wrote in his autobiography, "The work brings together reminiscences of Old Testament prophecy and proclamation of the Gospel with a general depiction of the Easter Service with its 'heathen jollity.' I say that quite deliberately: for is not the leaping and dancing of King David before the Ark of the Lord in the Bible an expression of essentially

the same thing as in heathen dances before their idols? Does not the sound of Russian bells pealing mean the same as the dancing strains of sacred instrumental music? Do not the flowing beards of the priests and sextons in their white surplices and vestments, singing in *Allegro vivo tempo*, 'beautiful Easter' take one back to pagan times? How far all this from the philosophic and socialistic teaching of Christ! These legendary and heathen characteristics of the festival, this change in mood from the sombre mystery of Good Friday to the uninhibited rejoicing of Easter Day are the very things that I wanted to express in my overture."

He took the themes from the *Obikhod* (1772), a collection of traditional church canticles that was the first music printed in Russia. The melodies would have been quite familiar to the overture's early audiences. The solemn opening section unmistakably evokes the chanting and the responsorial style of the Orthodox Church service. It is based on the canticles "Let God arise" (evocatively intoned by the entire woodwind section) and "An angel wailed". To the composer, it suggested "the ancient Isaiah's prophecy concerning the resurrection of Christ." The transition to the ensuing *allegro* expressed "the ineffable light in which (the holy sepulchre) had been bathed at the moment of resurrection."

The *allegro* employs the vigorous but stern canticle "Let them that also hate Him flee before Him", and "the joyous Christ is arisen". Solo trombone takes the spotlight in a solemn recitative imitating the voice of the Russian Deacon. Reminiscences of earlier themes appear amidst the clamorous concluding section, as the music proceeds, bells tolling and brass thundering, to its triumphant conclusion.

—Program note by Don Anderson

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

Finlandia, Op. 26

Composed 1899

8 min

FINLANDIA ORIGINATED IN THE MUSIC that Jean Sibelius composed in 1899 for a patriotic event in Helsinki called the Press Celebrations. On that occasion, he titled the work *Finland Awakes*. Revised as a separate piece and rechristened *Finlandia*, it was premièred at a concert in Helsinki on July 2, 1900, conducted by Robert Kajanus.

While Sibelius was a young man, Finland lay under oppressive Russian rule. In November 1899, with press censorship in full force, a group of artists in the capital, Helsinki, organized a series of Press Celebrations. Although the organizers of those events announced them as a gesture of support for those journalists who had taken a stand against the abuses of Russian rule, they also covertly intended them to promote the wider cause of Finland's right to a free society.

The centerpiece was a stage pageant that presented uplifting scenes from Finnish history. Sibelius, the country's foremost composer as well as an ardent patriot, was the natural choice to provide incidental music. He had already composed similar scores to accompany theatrical productions, including a play, *King Christian II*.

For the 1899 Press Celebrations, he composed a prelude and six pieces, one to introduce each scene. The grand finale was a stirring work embodying both the Finns' spirit of resistance and their faith in their eventual return to democracy. Receiving extraordinary enthusiasm, it outlived its premièred and won enduring popularity, not only for its stirring musical values, but also as an internationally recognized anthem of freedom.

Snarling brass and thunderous timpani open *Finlandia* in arresting fashion.

Woodwinds and strings introduce gentler, more spiritual but still defiant music. Tempo and activity accelerate into an exciting martial episode. A slow, hymn-like theme embodies aspiration, and a reprise of the martial theme is followed by a proudly radiant apotheosis of the hymn tune.

—Program note by Don Anderson



↑ Jean Sibelius Square, located at 50 Kendal Ave. in Toronto's Annex neighbourhood, features this monument to the famous Finn. The inscription at the base reads: "To honour a great composer this memorial was presented to the City of Toronto by the Finnish people of Canada on the twentieth day of September 1959."

Anna Clyne (b. 1980)

This Moment

Composed 2023

6 min

FROM THE COMPOSER: *This Moment* is inspired by the calligraphy of Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Zen Master, and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh, who passed away in January 2022 at the age of 95. It is a meditation on his words “this moment is full of wonders.”

This Moment is also a response to our collective grief and loss in recent years, and borrows two moments from Mozart’s Requiem, the work with which *This Moment* was premièred by The Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin in July 2023.

“

The meditation on death is a very important meditation. When you meditate on death, you love life more, you cherish life more. We can learn many lessons from it.

—THICH NHAT HANH

The first moment borrowed from Mozart’s Requiem is an ascending chromatic line in the sopranos, and the fugal subject in the basses, from “Kyrie”. The second borrowed moment is the instrumental introduction to “Lacrimosa” from “Sequentia”. The first line of the text, which translates as “Full of tears will be that day,” reminds me of Thich Nhat Hanh’s words that “the tears I shed yesterday have become rain.”

COMPOSER BIO: Described as a “composer of uncommon gifts and unusual methods” by *The New York Times*, and as “fearless” by NPR, GRAMMY®-

nominated Anna Clyne is one of the most in-demand and widely performed composers today, working with orchestras, choreographers, filmmakers, and visual artists around the world. Clyne has been commissioned and presented by the world’s most dynamic and revered arts institutions.

An innovative and cross-disciplinary artist, Clyne creates visual art in conjunction with her compositional process in such works as *Night Ferry* and *PALETTE*, and draws from the poetry and writings of Rilke, Dickinson, and Mary Oliver for *Orbits*, *The Gorgeous Nothings*, and *Wild Geese*, respectively. In addition, Clyne has recently developed the Augmented Orchestra with sound designer Jody Elf, with the new technology expanding the sound world of the orchestra through computer-controlled processes.

Clyne’s music is represented on several labels, including the 2025 album *Abstractions* on Naxos, featuring the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra conducted by Marin Alsop. Previous portrait albums include *SHORTHAND* (2024, Sony Classical), featuring soloists Yo-Yo Ma, Avi Avital, and Pekka Kuusisto, and *Mythologies* (2020, Avie) with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Her cello concerto, *DANCE*, which was recorded by soloist Inbal Segev, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and Marin Alsop, has garnered over 12 million plays on Spotify. Clyne’s music is published exclusively by Boosey & Hawkes. boosey.com/clyne

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Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Symphony No. 5 in D Major, Op. 107 “Reformation”

Composed 1832

33 min

AS EARLY AS THE BEGINNING OF 1829, Mendelssohn was formulating ideas for a religious symphony, entitled “Reformation”, in anticipation of the June 1830 celebrations in Berlin of the tercentenary of the Augsburg Confession, one of the founding documents of the Lutheran Church. He apparently expected to receive an official commission to contribute music for the celebrations—but he never did. Some have speculated that anti-Semitism was to blame. Mendelssohn was raised a Lutheran, but he was still generally regarded as Jewish. He may have been considered a less than ideal candidate for other reasons, too: though extraordinarily gifted, he was barely out of his teens and held no official position in Berlin’s musical establishment; moreover, he was writing a long Romantic symphony for an occasion on which sacred choral music was more appropriate.

Mendelssohn had written the first three movements by March of 1830, and even when it became clear that no commission would be forthcoming, he did not abandon the symphony. In fact, when he completed it in May, he was convinced that his ambitious new work was a watershed in his career. However, he had trouble finding a public for it and became discouraged. It wasn’t until the summer of 1832, when Mendelssohn revised the work, that he finally gave the première under his own baton at a benefit concert. It was well received, yet Mendelssohn’s opinion of the symphony, for reasons not entirely clear, would soon change drastically: he came to think of it as a failure. He consigned the score to his desk drawer, and it was not

published or performed again until more than 20 years after his death.

The “Reformation” Symphony is a highly original piece of religious program music depicting the triumph of Protestantism. In the first movement, Mendelssohn portrays an intense spiritual struggle away from Catholicism. In the slow introduction, he mimics the counterpoint of Renaissance composers—Catholic counterpoint—and his scoring has an organ-like majesty. At the end of the introduction, fanfares in the woodwinds and brass are twice answered by a hushed cadence in the strings—the so-called “Dresden Amen”, a motif familiar in Catholic regions of Germany and associated with the Holy Spirit. This leads into a fast, stormy movement that alternately rages and broods, and the Dresden Amen is strikingly reprised right after a terrifying climax.

In the more earthbound second movement, the music is cheerful and homely—processional in the outer sections, pastoral and naive in the middle. The programmatic implications are not so obvious, though the mood is certainly more contented than conflicted. The third movement is deeper, more personal: a short, despairing aria, confined mostly to the strings.

The finale features the Lutheran chorale “Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott” (“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”), scored at first for massed woodwinds. The chorale, which follows the dark third movement with the effect of a balm, offers a musical image of religious consolation: this is the solution to which the spiritual strivings of the first movement aspired—a specifically Protestant solution.

—Program note by Kevin Bazzana



Nicholas Sharma, RBC Resident Conductor & TSYO Conductor

In the 2025/26 season, Nicholas Sharma joins the Toronto Symphony Orchestra as RBC Resident Conductor and Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra Conductor. He has led performances with orchestras across North America, earning recognition for his versatility and musical artistry.

Recent conducting highlights include début performances with the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and the Eugene Symphony, as well as serving as Assistant Conductor of the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra and Music Director of the South Dakota Symphony Youth Orchestra for the 2024/25 season.

He has participated in master classes and summer festivals with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the New World Symphony, the National Academy Orchestra of Canada, the Aspen Music Festival, and the Colorado College Summer Music Festival, working with such distinguished conductors as Michael Tilson Thomas, Stéphane Denève, Neeme Järvi, Robert Spano, Nicholas McGegan, Mark Stringer, and Boris Brott.

A native of the Toronto area, Sharma began his musical studies as a violinist. He holds a degree in violin performance from the Eastman School of Music, where he studied with Oleh Krysa, and a master's degree in orchestral conducting from the University of Oregon under David Jacobs. In 2024, he completed a Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) degree in orchestral conducting at Eastman, studying with Neil Varon. His return to Toronto marks both a personal and professional homecoming as he takes on these new artistic leadership roles.



↑

The musicians of the TSYO stand for applause following their performance of *May the Fifth Be with You: Beethoven & Star Wars* on February 15, 2025.

Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra

Nicholas Sharma, conductor

FOR 52 SEASONS, since its founding under the direction of Victor Feldbrill in 1974, the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra (TSYO) has been dedicated to providing a high-level orchestral experience for talented young musicians aged 22 and under. The tuition-free TSYO program delivers a unique, powerful, and life-enriching opportunity that encourages significant achievement, regardless of participants' chosen career paths. The TSYO is closely affiliated with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra: TSO musicians serve as coaches through the season, TSO guest artists lead TSYO master classes, and the TSYO performs annually with the TSO in a side-by-side concert.

VIOLINS

Aida Chegini
Anamaria Khingava
Annika Kho
Ariel Loboda
Chelsea Gu
Chelsea Wan
Chloe Ng
Edward Wu
Emily Wang
Joy Cha-Kang
Lucas Ju
Marion Cha-Kang
Oliver (Zihuan) Xu
Richard Xiong
Roland Ding
Salma Khakimov
Sophia Zhang
Sophie Cheung
Tina Sievers
Victoria Gilerovitch
Xinru Lai
Yusuf Tajbakhsh
Zhuoyi Yang
Zoe Lai-Yi Clarke

VIOLAS

Celine Aricibasi
Emily Liao
Gabriella Liu
Isla Ertl
Larry Zheng
Lauren Liang
Nathan Wu
Noah Haro Jang
Peggy Zhu
Sam Talebi
Solomon Cheung

CELLOS

Austin Dong
Claire Wang

Unice Choe
George Gernega
Maggie Marshman
Matthew Ng
Rebecca Lima
Ruichen Wang
Ryan Yin
Stella Chang
Yuheng (Hassel) Chen

DOUBLE BASSES

Alice Quach
Danylo Tkaczyk
Emma Chen
Jikai (Nick) Zhang
Julia Li
Richard Nemeth
Wang Hin (Marcus) Chan
Xiaoyi (Ashley) Ruan

FLUTES

Eleanor Song
Karri Li
Rowan Froh

OBOES

Clara Aristanto
Hingyi Cui
Jason Fan

CLARINETS

Farimah Khorrami
Marco Ding
Michelle Jin

BASSOONS

Kendal Morrison
Spencer Mendez
Taran Massey-Singh

HORNS

Avery Hubert
Ethan Chialtas
Jingyao (Victor) Hu

Sophia Choi
Qiwei Liu

TRUMPETS

Andre Zi-an Jin
Kevin Zhao
Tamsin Spiller
Teresa Osko

TROMBONES

Abellia Chan
Alina Dai
Amy Jordaan

TUBA

Jack Shiels

PERCUSSION

Bowen Wang
Elyssa Arde
Jack Wong
Jon Bilek
Matthew Medina

HARPS

Luc Hung
Wei qi (Vicky) Chen

PIANO

Jonathan Alter

STAFF

Matthew Robertson
TSYO Manager &
Community Assistant
Nicole Balm
Senior Director of
Education & Community
Engagement
Pierre Rivard
Family & School
Programs Manager

Angela Maria Sanchez

Education & Community
Engagement Coordinator

FACULTY

Nicholas Sharma
RBC Resident Conductor
& TSYO Conductor
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Volunteer Committee*

Ilan Mendel

TSYO Assistant Conductor

Shane Kim

Violin Coach
TSO Violin

Peter Seminov

Violin Coach
TSO Violin

Ivan Ivanovich

Viola Coach
TSO Viola

Emmanuelle Beaulieu Bergeron

Cello Coach
TSO Associate Principal
Cello

Christopher Laven

Double Bass Coach
TSO Double Bass

Miles Haskins

Woodwind Coach
TSO Clarinet & Bass
Clarinet

Renata Cardoso

Brass Coach
TSO Trumpet

Joseph Kelly

Percussion Coach
TSO Percussion/Assistant
Principal Timpani